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VANITAS

PAUL ELDRIDGE



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VANITAS

BY
PAUL ELDRIDGE



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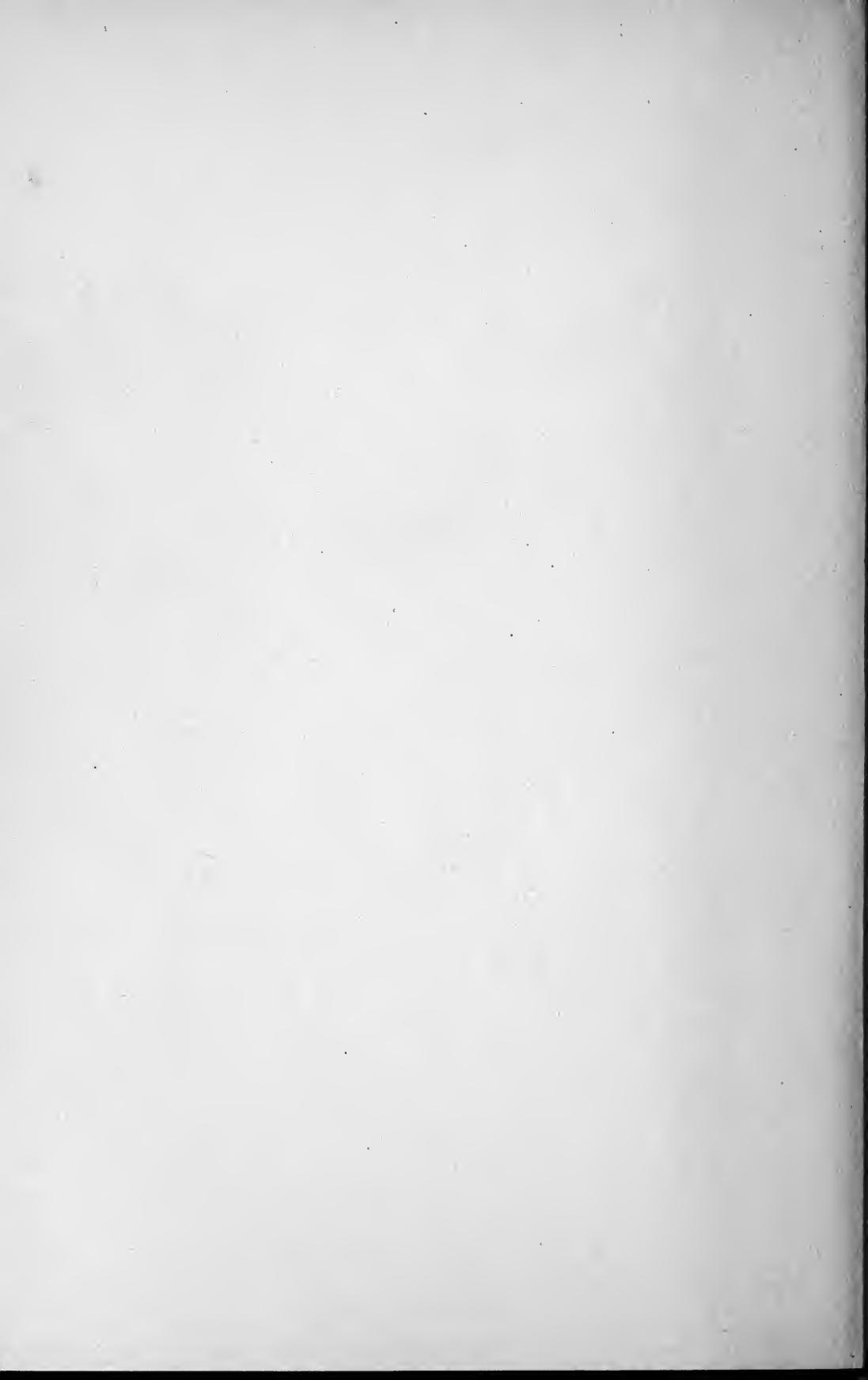
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VANITAS

A Sylvia,—vanité exquise

One can sing of beautiful things,
For beautiful things are not perfect;
One cannot sing of Beauty herself,
For Beauty and Perfection are One. . . .
How, then, shall I sing of my Love?



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My Thoughts

My thoughts are little clowns,
Irreverent and merry,
That stick their tongues
To Sun and Moon,
And laugh at Men and Gods.

My thoughts are silver flutes,
Playing strange romanzas
In my ears,
That make me dream
And weep.

My thoughts are shaven monks
That count their rosaries
Listlessly
Forever.

My thoughts are flocks of blackbirds
That turn in endless circles,
And caw — and caw.

My thoughts are tiny Jovelets
In atom skies,

V A N I T A S

Ruling cosmos
For a Breath's
Eternity.

My thoughts are flakes of snow
That fall and fall,
And vanish —
Or turn to mud.

My thoughts are timorous mice
Gnawing at Illusions,
Afraid of Truth,
The grey-eyed Cat.

My thoughts are blue-rimmed lakes,
And Earth and Sky,
Voluptuous women
Come bathing there.

My thoughts are tremulous echoes
Of far-off drums
The stars are beating on
With silver rays.

My thoughts are red hyenas
That dig within my heart
And munch its memories,
And laugh.

V A N I T A S

My thoughts are cemeteries
Where wander nightly
White-sheeted ghosts
That wail and moan.

My thoughts —
How well for me,
They are so deeply hidden
In the circus of my brain !

V A N I T A S

I Dream

Life gallops by like a mad horse —
But I sit at the window and dream —
I dream of still marble oceans like giant
sarcophagi
Bordered with tall alabaster trees whose ebony
shadows
Cut fantastic caves across their bosoms.

Life howls like a wild hurricane —
But I sit at the window and dream —
I dream of vast solitary skies, like sapphire
deserts,
Where dead black moons and dead black stars,
blind sphinxes,
Squat in echoless eternity.

Life sings like a drunken bird,
But I sit at the window and dream —
I dream of her dead eyes. . . .

V A N I T A S

Invitation to a Funeral

Tomorrow I bury my dead hopes.
Tomorrow at high noon,
When all things are flushed with life,
I shall bury them.
I have stretched them all out,
Side by side,
Delicate, exquisite hopes.
I have caressed them for the last time.
They lie so still and white, —
They seem asleep,
Dreaming of quiet lakes,
And thin long shadows of trees. . . .
Tomorrow I shall dig a very deep grave
Within my heart,
And bury my dead hopes,
Gently, tenderly.
I shall sing a requiem for them,
Low and sad,
Like the dream of a desolate wind.
I shall throw heavy shovels
Of mud and pebbles
Upon them,

V A N I T A S

And fill their grave
To the brim.
I shall smoothen it
With the back of my shovel. . . .
I shall plant tall cypresses.
Sleepy owls shall perch upon them.
Passing winds shall pout their thin white lips
Against their leaves,
And whistle,
The endless song of endless misery. . . .

My friends and relatives—
Particularly those who killed my dreams—
Are cordially invited
To attend the funeral services.
They need not drag with them
The awful burden of a tear.

V A N I T A S

The Forgetful Owls

Nightly,
Silence summons to herself
The Owls of the world,
And whispers in their feathered ears
The Truth of Things,
Which they promise
To repeat to Man
When he wakes.
But the Sun,
The hater of Truth,
Dazzles their round eyes,
And they fall asleep,
And dream —
And forget. . . .
And Man seeks —
Seeks in vain
What only Silence
And the Owls know. . . .

V A N I T A S

The Daisy Speaks

What am I?
The poets have named me
A star, and a sun, and a ripple
Of a silver and golden sea,
And the amorous virgin
Has kissed and caressed me,
And asked of my petals
Her fate;
The rain has pattered on me
With the rhythm
Of quicksilver sticks
On a drum,
And the moon,
An evening or two ago,
Whitened and glared me so,
I seemed a thin and shivering ghost!

The Earth is whispering softly:
This day,
When shadows shall drop
On her bosom,
The granite-made hoof

V A N I T A S

Of the mountainous cow
Shall fall
With the weight of a world
On me, and render me
Mud!

But now — A windlet is sporting with me,
And shakes me and shakes me,
Like a silent and golden tongue
Of an unseen bell!

What am I?

V A N I T A S

Faces and Souls

Faces, faces, faces . . .
An orgic dance of faces,
An insane carnival of faces . . .
Mouths and cheeks and noses,
And a crumbled Heaven of eyes,—
Eyes that shine and dim,
Like endless summer-fields
Of twinkling fireflies
Upon some moonless night—
Eyes that seek and grieve,
And laugh and weep,
And stare at last
Like oval chips
Of frozen glass . . .
Faces.
And beneath them
Souls—
Small fearing souls,
Thin, hungry souls,
Phantom sphinxes,
Obscene and cynical—
Souls yearning and sobbing,

V A N I T A S

And dying . . .
Souls that spew forever
Like slimy crustacea,
Stony masks of faces
And skulk beneath them.
Faces and souls —
In a mad dance,
In a wild carousel —
Faces and souls,
An infinite desert
Of tombs and silences. . . .

V A N I T A S

Time's Castanets

Topsy with my sweetheart's kisses,
I whispered in her mouth —
"Dearest —
Our wonder Love —
Is like yonder star —
Immortal — "

Time,
Hidden in a spider's web,
Rattled castanets
Of bones,
And laughed. . . .

I know not
What my sweetheart heard —
My whisper in her mouth —
Or Time's castanets —

But she wept —

My Days Pass Me By

My days pass me by —
This one, on tiptoes,
Like a forbidden hope —
This — a clumsy villager
Stamping wooden shoes
Against curbstones —
These — heavy and slow,
Despaired insomnia
Staring out of windows
Counting stars —
This — thin and shapeless,
A bit of grayish cloud,
That little winds puff on —
These — bent with secrets and with cares,
Like hunchback women parading. . . .
My days pass me by —
Some weeping bitterly
Into half-closed fists,
Some wriggling bony fingers
On their pointed noses. . . .
My days pass me by —
The long cortege of mourners
At my funeral.

V A N I T A S

My Hopes

My hopes are gay-painted moths,
Voluptuous clowns,
Fluttering to delirious music —
But the red-eyed flame —
Whistles and laughs —
Whistles and laughs. . . .

My hopes are merry birds
That sing their rapture
To the skies —
But the cat —
The taciturn Sphinx —
Watches,
And her eyes
Glitter — glitter. . . .

My hopes are tiny starlets
In the sand,
Dancing cotillions
To the sun —
But the Night comes,

V A N I T A S

And the winds blow,
And the winds blow. . . .

My hopes — my hopes —
My foolish little hopes. . . .

V A N I T A S

My Sweetheart Dreams

The boat glides very softly
Like some melancholy swan,—
My sweetheart tears slowly
The petals of a rose,
And dreams—
Dreams of other loves than mine.

V A N I T A S

A Picture

Three old men smoking pipes,
And playing dominoes —
One remembers a dead wife,
One thinks of a tune he used to
 whistle,
One has forgotten everything
Save how to move correctly
Black oblongs with white dots and
 lines —
Three old men smoking pipes,
And playing dominoes. . . .

V A N I T A S

Douleur

Why should my hopes
Like yellow withered leaves
Fall to the ground,
And turn to mud,—
While my regrets
Must grow and blossom
Like giant evergreens,
And throw their dismal shadows
Across my path ?

V A N I T A S

Modesty

Let the vain bird
Sing to all the winds
His vulgar love —
The love of butterfly
Would wither, sorrowed,
If the gentle roses
Heard the flutter of his wings.

V A N I T A S

Frivolity Punished

The stars are frivolous tonight,
Mocking the nakedness of trees—
I shall punish them,
I shall close my eyes,—
They shall tumble like glass-beads
Into the velvet-bag of Night!

V A N I T A S

Weariness

An ant,
Tumbling into his cell,
The last load
Dropping out of his mouth.

V A N I T A S

Shadows

The shadows of mountains
Fall lighter than a robin's feather
Upon the Earth —
But the shadows of my thoughts
Fall heavy and limp
Like leaden corpses
Upon my heart.

V A N I T A S

Gloria Mundi

A drunkard sits upon the grass
And sings, between the hiccoughs,
A vapid song—
Underneath him,
In the mud and slime of worms
rots Maestro's throat,
The greatest tenor of his age.

V A N I T A S

You Pass Me On

You pass me on —

You go your little way, to laugh your little
 laugh, to shed your little tear — alone !

You pass me on —

Though I am your brother — flesh and blood
 and soul.

To the dog you meet upon the road, you whistle,
 and smile if he follows —

But I am as a stone that must be shoved aside to
 make a passageway —

I — your brother !

You have your little home, with closed shutters,
You have your little nation, stuck upon a flag-
 pole,

You have your little church with special hymns,
 your little god that blesses only you —

And that's your life.

And I am as a hated stranger to you —

You would cheat me, you would mock me,
You would starve me — for your little self !

V A N I T A S

And yet I am your brother!
At your side I walk the stony earth,
And the blood of your weary feet mingles with
mine!

I am your brother —
Born with the morning hour, and dead with the
night!
I am your brother for the space of a single day,
And yet you spurn me!

You pass me on —
As though your hand could heal the deep
wounds it makes,
As though eternity were yours to be forgiven in!
You pass me on —
And go to laugh your little laugh, to shed your
little tear — alone!

V A N I T A S

You Were So Pure

You were so pure,
So exquisite,
I feared to touch
Your little hand,
I feared to bend upon my knee,
And swear eternal passion.
You were so tender,
So like the unblown bud
Of a fragile rose,
I dared not whisper,
“I love you,”
That like some coarse wind
I might not tear
The delicate petals.
And so I walked away,
And wept my sorrow
Into my hands.

And now you’re married —
You gave a dowry,
And bargained cleverly
To be a wife.

V A N I T A S

I saw you hang upon his arm,
And look with amorous desire
Into his eyes,—
While he was yawning. . . .
And so I walked away,
And laughed my sorrow
Into my hands.

V A N I T A S

The Bachelor

One evening in his youth
As the waters were a-dancing
To the music of the moon,
He met a fairy,
Golden-eyed and golden-haired,
Who whispered playfully,
“I love you!”
And vanished.
He has spent his life
In search of her.
He has asked a thousand girls,
Golden-eyed and golden-haired,—
“Do you remember,
One evening long ago,
As the waters were a-dancing
To the music of the moon,
You whispered,—”

He’s fifty now,
Gray and rheumatic,
And rather petulant;

V A N I T A S

But still he hopes,
Some happy evening,
When the waters are a-dancing
To the music of the moon,
He shall meet his fairy,
Golden-eyed and golden-haired,
Who will whisper playfully,
“I love you!”

V A N I T A S

Success

He considered life
A towering mansion,
And Man's purpose
To reach its height
And so,
He climbed,
And climbed,
And climbed,
Until
Bleeding and breathless
He reached,
At last,
The rat-smelling
Attic. . . .

V A N I T A S

The Black Cat

The Mice,
The Inhabitants of the Earth,
The cosmic Cellar,
Are gnawing clamorously,
And disturb
The sleeping of the Stars —
The Ancient Guardian
Swings his lantern — The Moon —
As he descends
The mouldy steps
Of Infinity,—
While the Black Cat
Under his arm
Meaws — meaws —

V A N I T A S

The Candle and the Sun

The sun raised his golden head
Above the snow-bound parapets
Of Eastern mountains,
And smiled to the Earth below
Still sleepy as himself.

The candle in my room,
Near-sighted, squinted,
And sputtered in anger,
Until she lay
In sullen globs
Upon the floor.

“He’s come again, the Libertine,
From the night’s wild revelry
Among the oceans and the seas,
The fickle courtesans.

He’s come again —
To flatter with his myriad colors
The silly Earth.

To turn the mud to gold
And the wet grasses
To diadems of pearls.

He’s come again —
And I, the truth of things,

V A N I T A S

The herald of reality,
Shall be as blind
As some weary owl
Hidden in forgotten ruins,
And melt within the desert air
From sheerest melancholy!

Alas, such world. . . .
Where Falsehood sits with gods in Heaven,
Making merriment,
While Truth,
Imprisoned in a fist of brass,
Must die in the orgie dances
Of mad colors!"

A sudden breath of wind,
The master mocker,
Blew,—
A slender stream of smoke
Arose, and filled the air
With the acrid smell
Of heavy tallow-wick. . . .

The Sun,
Now wide awake,
Danced gaily
On the snow-bound parapets
With golden feet. . . .

V A N I T A S

Dying

The sun is falling
Behind the Seas,
Some blades of grass
Shrink and curve;
A rose is dangling
Against its stalk,
Like a head that hurts.
A robin's notes
Have vanished
With the winds;
Some footsteps
Turn the corner,
And a girl stands and weeps —
In a coffin
Something lies outstretched,
And candles burn. . . .

V A N I T A S

The Sun, the Poet, and the Cow

The Sun was sinking
In gorgeous nonchalance —
A god contented,
Assured of endless life.

In ecstasy the Poet
Stretched forth his arms,
And improvised in fervent verse
A hymn of joy and reverence,
And knelt
And prayed. . . .

The Cow, reclining on the grass
A gracious queen,
Upraised her head
And blandly looked
And thought:
“How youthful is the race of man,
And garrulous!
Some day they’ll learn
That nothing is or matters

V A N I T A S

Save to chew the cud
In careless elegance,
And sleep. . . . ”

The Poet prayed on and on . . .
The Cow chewed on and on . . .
The Sun was sinking
In gorgeous nonchalance. . . .

V A N I T A S

The Loaded Dice

I've lost —
In spite of pains and labors,
And eighty years of life,
In spite of all applause,
And busts and statues,
I'm but a mass of bones
Within an oblong box,
And both to be dissolved together,
And kneaded into mud,
The muffled drum of the ages' rain,
A pathway for the lonesome cows
For many generations —
I've lost, 'tis true,
But then —
I played with God —
And now I understand —
His dice are always loaded !

V A N I T A S

You and He

You are a golden dream
Walking through muddy streets,
Raising your white silk dress,
Daintily.

He is a clumsy boar
Walking through a golden dream,
Shaking stupidly
The sun-dipped particles
From his paws.

V A N I T A S

Divine Alms

In the Winter,
The trees are naked mendicants
Lifting crooked hands
In supplication.

The gods are bountiful—
They throw upon them
Profusely,—
Sleet and snow.

V A N I T A S

Winter-Dreams

The sleepy Earth,
Draws over her face,
The soft, white quilt,
And dreams —
Blue and yellow daisies.

V A N I T A S

The Lakelet Meditates

I am the eternal Heavens,
And the stars and the sun lie upon me
More softly than the sudden dipping
Of a swallow's wing—
And above, in Infinite Space,
An azure toy-mirror
Reflects me forever. . . .

V A N I T A S

Absence

When you are away, my love,
The evil spirits of Things,
Creep out like gray mice
And make strange noises,
Frightening me.

V A N I T A S

O Diamond, Beautiful and Rare!

O diamond, beautiful and rare,
Shining on my lady fair,
As a mimic sun on earth,
How can you know what gave you birth,—
The eyes blinded for your sheen,
The whetted hearts to make you keen,
Virgins' love to build you white,
Children's laughs to lend delight,—
Within your tiny measured span,
Lies a hecatomb of man!

O diamond, beautiful and rare,
Shining on my lady fair,
Could you but guess what gave you life,
The blood, the agony, the strife,
You would in utter pain and shame
Burn your heart within your flame,
And fall black ashes on the floor,
Avenger of the countless poor!

V A N I T A S

Solitude

The tides rise and fall,
Rise and fall,
Rocking all things on their soft breasts,
Save me —
A silver-fingered wave
Has dashed me on the shore,
And left me
The sport of sands —
Alas,—what matters a shell
To tides that rise and fall,
Rise and fall.

V A N I T A S

Subject for a Farce

Night —

An old woman sitting at the window —

Dreaming . . .

Suddenly,

Softly,

Her name is called —

“Florence — Florence — Florence!”

She shivers —

Rises —

Bends out —

A neighbor’s window opens,

A gentle voice whispers —

“All right, dearest—come up—I am alone” . . .

An old woman standing at the window,

Dreaming. . . .

V A N I T A S

The Singer

Daily, when the wives of men are busy,
And rub their pots and clatter dishes,
And scold and teach their little children,
She comes into our yard and sings to us—
A thin, uncertain voice that breaks
And re-begins, and breaks again,
She sings to us
Of lads and lasses kissing,
Of flowers, trees and eternal pledges,
Of sun, and stars, and the roguish moons,
Romances that mingle daily
With the noises of pots and dishes,
And the scolding of the little children.
She sings to us—
The aged hag,
That smells of whiskey and of garlic,
Hungered like some mangy dog,
That prowls in the garbage cans,
Swollen-eyed, toothless,
Hideous in her piteous look—
The ultimate dreg of human misery.
She sings to us.

V A N I T A S

I always throw a coin,
Which rings with jubilance upon the asphalt
floor,
And watch her rush to get it,
I feel so like some tiny godlet
Who from a tiny heaven
Shows blessings on the earth!

V A N I T A S

Man and Superman

Who is the Superman?
What mighty giant
Unmoved and solitary,
Laughing as the gods can laugh
In irony
At the infinite circus of stars,
That dance and fall and crumble,
And learning the total purport
In the melancholy music
Of the lonesome winds?

Who is the Superman?
I know him not!
He has not wept with me,
And his blood in agony
Has not mingled
With mine!
He has not stooped
In awe and utter ignorance
Over blades of grass,
Or forsaken shells
Upon the shores.

V A N I T A S

Has he trembled and shivered
With my fears?
Has he shouted to dissolving clouds
His hopes and his despair?
Was he born of pain,
And shall he die,
As I must die,
In anguish?

Who is the Superman?
I know him not!

I know but Man—
The weak, the fool, the clown,
My enemy, my brother!

V A N I T A S

My Heart

My heart is a forest asleep
With ghosts of desires and dreams
Moaning their sorrowful tales
To the nodding leaves.

My heart is a sensitive drum
And the hours, master musicians
Beat their pleasures and pains.

My heart is a diligent horse
That drags his cart-load of blood
In stupid submission —

Alas! he will grow weary—and fall!

V A N I T A S

My Ambition

I have but one ambition—
To be a red cloud,
And hang a summer's night
Upon the moon's chin,
Like the unkempt beard
Of a white-headed goat,
And make the gods laugh,
And the one-eyed stars dance,
And the earth profound and scholarly,
Dispute and theorize . . .

Alas, my indolence. . . .

V A N I T A S

I Am the Rebel

I am the rebel!

Not he who fights against a state, a king, a word,
Not he who accepts himself, but refuses the
things of man,

Who says, "Change this — or this — and all is
well!"

I am the rebel against myself,

Against the fates that bore me, against the gods
That mocking make me laugh or weep.

I hate the masters,

I hate the forces that play with me

As plays a little boy

With card-board marionettes!

The tiny wind holds sport, and drives me on,

The threaded ray a thousand years a-distant

Makes merry over my eyes, and orders

"This shall be black for you, and this white!"

The senseless stone commands my foot,

The silly rain strikes my face as blindly as the
earth,—

Nay, I am not even a favorite among the toys
That Nature makes to while away eternity!

V A N I T A S

I am the rebel—
I hate life with her caprices and follies and tortures,
I hate death—the reward of the fool,
I hate the creator, blind and deaf and merciless,
I hate myself, the product of a moment's game,
That willed it,—“This shall you be—
This body, these nerves, this blood,
And these infinite traits and inheritances!”
I would be beyond myself, a law omnipotent,
A conscious god, master of all fates and forces!

I am the rebel—
Blind and bound and powerless—
Nailed to the cross, I wriggle still!
Though it be my own self I torture,
Though my fists strike back against my chest,
I will not accept—I will not bow—
Vanquished I disobey,
Vanquished I fight and die
THE REBEL!

V A N I T A S

Resist All Evil

“Resist not evil!”

How well indeed for scoundrels!

Slaves, your backs shall bend beneath their whip
in joy,

And pray it grow the stronger and the sharper,
To prove you worthy martyrs to a tyrant’s
adage!

O glittering words!

O bitter warfare clad in peace!

O Satan-smile beneath a god’s decree!

“Resist not evil!”

That evil grow luxuriant,

And they who perpetrate it grow rich and
strong,

Till changed shall be the dictum —

“Fools, you can’t resist the evil!”

I say — “Resist all evil!”

Your cheek unturned, strike back the blow,

The sword by sword shall answer!

“Resist all evil!”

Till evil hands fall leaden,

And evil hearts turn dust!

V A N I T A S

Youth

Each man's youth is a butterfly,
Many-colored and gay,
But mine was gray-colored
And wise —
He alighted in a corner
To watch the others
Dance about the flames,
And burn —
He folded his wings —
And thought
And moralized —
Until he grew stiffened and dry,
And his little dust
Fell into the palms
Of a passing wind.

V A N I T A S

Illusion

Life was a weary trudging
Through sticky mud —
I yearned for Death,
The golden wind,
The ceaseless merger of things —
I thought I'd join the cosmos
In her rapturous career,
Dance cotillions with the stars,
Kiss the red lips of moons,
Scatter voluptuous perfumes
From a rose's chalice. . . .

Are the cracks in this mouldy wood
The dancing stars ?
Are these scarlet worms,
Crawling, heavily,
Like pregnant things
Upon my teeth,
The lips of moons ?
Is my coffin the cosmos,
In her rapturous career ?
Is there a cosmos ?
Death is as futile as Life !

V A N I T A S

Winter

It is always Winter—
For, have not my hopes,
Which were blossoming trees,
Dropped all their leaves—
And has not the Wind,
Melancholy Sexton,
Wound about their shrivelled limbs,
A white shroud?
And in my heart,
Does not a thin wolf
Howl. . . ?

V A N I T A S

In Spring

The things I loved, died —
I dug a grave,
And buried them,
Tenderly,
Like wounded hearts,
With all the pomp
Of tears and verse.

“I’ll return in Spring,
And gather daisies,
The gentle souls
Of the things I loved.”

In Spring —
I returned —
And found upon the grave
Of the things I loved —
A dead rat,
And stout, angry flies
Devouring him —

In Spring —

V A N I T A S

Snobbery

The artificial flower on the girl's hat
Looks at the rose upon the stalk,
And turns a dusty petal in disdain —
“A vulgar plant, born in the mud,
Too red, and spreading evil scents,
Mistress of bees and butterflies,
Inconstant, unashamed,
Nodding to all the breezes . . .
To-morrow she will wither. . . .”

V A N I T A S

Hot-House Dreams

I dream of scarlet Autumns
And white-mouthing Winds
Whose long, cool kisses
Lull to endless sleep . . .
Alas, it's always Summer!

V A N I T A S

The New Leaves

The new leaves upon the trees
Deeply-colored and firm,
Challenge the winds of the Earth :—
“You shall not wither
And scatter us,
As you have withered and scattered
The leaves of other Springs!”

.
The winds are very deaf!

V A N I T A S

Surviver

All the leaves have fallen —
Save one —
Swinging,
Dizzy and scared,
In the winds. . . .

V A N I T A S

Generation

This is the meaning of a generation —
A pebble thrown into a placid lake —
A sudden spray, like a tiny wavelet,
Trembling circles in quick succession —

A placid lake. . . .

V A N I T A S

Death

Death is a white swan
Sailing noiselessly —
Leaving behind him
Long, tremulous creases —
The creases smoothen —
He sails noiselessly on. . . .

V A N I T A S

Memories

My memories were sharp-edged splinters
Torturing me,—
I plucked them out,
And washed the blood away.

Have splinters roots,
That grow,
And blossom,—
Rancorous evergreens?

V A N I T A S

The Saintly Dog

My lady's dog is always leashed —
A perfect dog —
A sinless dog —
When he is dead —
His soul shall enter Canine Eden,
Where he will utter ceaselessly
Echo-barks,
And sniff forever
Shadow females,—
A joy eternal to his God.

V A N I T A S

The World Is Ill

The world is ill —
And the Rain falls softly,
Softly,
Like gentle nurses on tip-toes.

V A N I T A S

Flirtation

You are a dainty Birdlet
Swinging giddily
On the frailest twig —
I am a gray-eyed Tom-Cat
Watching —
Alas! You never fall. . . .

V A N I T A S

Old Age

The Rock pleads ceaselessly,—
“Listen!
Listen!
I was not always a rock —
I too —”
But the waves laugh
And splash him
With their foam.

V A N I T A S

The Wind and the Leaves

The wind sleeps lazily
Among the leaves—
The wind shall laugh
In his dream—
The leaves shall shiver,
And fall. . . .

V A N I T A S

Prudence

I loved my days dearly,
And would not squander them.
I am old and dying,—
Where are my days?

V A N I T A S

A Shadow-Tree's Anxiety

I hope the little gold fish
Swimming in my branches,
Never see my other self,
Heavy and coarse,
Stuck upon my head,—
Why must Shadows have Realities?

V A N I T A S

The Builders

All things I own
Slowly turn to dust —
When I get old
I'll be the proud possessor
Of a rising hill. . . .
Is this how mighty gods
Build skies and earths?

V A N I T A S

Ghosts

Dead leaves
The wind rolls on,
Scaring little birds
That rocked on them.

V A N I T A S

My Years

My years fall softly,
Softly,
Like petals of a rose,
And leave me,
A barren, withered stalk
That dangles in the winds.

V A N I T A S

Ennui

(A CLOUD'S COMPLAINT)

The feverish mouth of the Earth
Breathes me forth,
The silver toes of the Wind
Toss me above the mountain peaks
Where I roll and stiffen
Into patches of gray and black —
Then —
I swell —
And crack —
And tumble
In dizzy streams of warm water
Back into the feverish mouth of the Earth —
I have done this since things began —
How long more is eternity?

A New Mythology



V A N I T A S

God

God is a little girl
Dressed in azure clouds, trimmed with rainbows —
A little girl, gay and mischievous,
That likes to play with mud,
And fashion little earths with little people,
Little skies with little stars,
Whole little planetary systems —
And then throws them high — high —
And shouts in merriment
To watch them glisten as they rip Infinity,—
And fall —
And crumble —

V A N I T A S

The Moon and the Ocean

The Moon,
A yellow tom-cat,
Struts moodily
Across the world
And bends
Her frail roof.

The ocean,
Petulant neighbor,
Nervous, unable to sleep,
Scolds and clamors and swears,—
Then weary,
Spits upward,
In jets of marble foam.

.
The Moon,
The old roué,
Watches with desire
The Earth below.
The Ocean,
Prudish maid,
Hides her breasts,
Feverishly,—
But the winds, laughing,

V A N I T A S

Blow off incessantly
Her flimsy draperies.

The Moon,
A golden hoop,
Rolls unsteadily
Upon the rugged edges
Of the shivering clouds.

The Ocean,
Mischievous girl,
Runs after—
Her hands raised up
To catch it,
And shouts and laughs
In utter merriment.

The Moon
The hoary recluse,
Gazes calmly
Across eternity,
And meditates
On Death.

The Ocean,
The Earth's demagogue,
Silver-tongued,

V A N I T A S

Harangues the winds,
Persuading them
To blow across the Moon
And blind him.

The Moon,
The painted mountebank
Of the infinite circus,
Grins and bows
To his celestial audience.

The Ocean,
A clumsy bear,
Sways and dances
To the bagpipes
Of the merry winds.

The Moon,
A frozen Sun,
Turning about the Earth
In a senseless loop-the-loop.

The Ocean —
A salty mass
Of steel-gray water
Dashing forever
Against her callous ribs.

V A N I T A S

Opinion

What Are the Stars?

THE STARS:

We are the Stars,
Eternal and unquenchable!

THE LAKE:

The stars are silver fish
Floating on their backs
Like dead leaves.

THE FIREFLIES:

The stars are fireflies
In neighboring fields.

THE WOLF:

The stars are shepherds' eyes
Watching over flocks —
But our feet
Fall more softly
Than shadows of lambs.

THE MOON:

The stars are bits of moons
That crumbled.
Alas! I too shall crumble
Into stars. . . .

V A N I T A S

THE MOUNTAIN PEAK:

The stars are flakes of Snow
Hardened against the clouds.
In the Summer,
They melt,
And drop on me.

THE OWL:

The stars are the gods of owls
Revealing the hidden nests
Of mice.
Blessed be the stars!

THE WIND:

The stars are lanterns
Night, the sorceress, swings,
As she seeks dead suns —
At dawn,
I blow them out.

THE TREE:

The stars are unripe cherries,
Torn and scattered
By the merciless wind.
Black clouds crush them
Beneath their hoofs.

DESERT:

The stars are the sands
Of the Upper Desert.

V A N I T A S

ETERNITY:

The stars are hours
In the trembling hands
Of Time.

THE SUN:

Stars?
There are no stars!

V A N I T A S

Opinion

What Is the Sun?

THE SUN:

I am the Sun,
Eternal and Unquenchable!

THE LAKE:

The sun is a thirsty deer
Lapping my water,
Greedily.

THE FIREFLIES:

Hail, Queen of Fireflies!
When thou art shining,
We hide, humble slaves,
Within the grasses!

SPRING:

The sun is a bowl
Of golden wine,
Overspilling —
Little birds drink of it,
And grow mad.

WINTER:

The sun is a solitary gull
Sailing on the crumbling crests
Of snows.

V A N I T A S

THE CLOUDS:

The sun is a mighty thinker,
And we are the shadows
Of his thoughts.

THE OWL:

The sun is a keen-edged sword
That pierces the eyes.

THE FIELDS:

The sun is a weary traveller
Sleeping upon us.

THE WOLF:

The sun is the terrible eye
Of the master
Watching his sheep —
Wise wolves hide.

ETERNITY:

The sun is a slow opening
Of an eye —
And then —
Blindness.

THE DESERT:

The sun is the mighty Dragon,
Slayer of the god of Waters.

THE STARS:

Sun ?
There is no sun !

V A N I T A S

Day and Night

An impish little god
Has ripped the azure tent
Of the cosmic circus,
And peeps in
And laughs—
Flowers pout their lips
And ask for kisses,
Birds, vain troubadours
Sing their amorous conceits
Upon the flutes of breezes,
And Man, the Cock of the World,
Proclaims most pompously,
“It’s Day!”

Soon,
The solemn Master Clown
Shall catch the little culprit,
And pull him in,
By the ear,
All flushed with shame. . . .

The sentimental flowers
Shall droop their heads,

V A N I T A S

And mourn
Love's inconstancies,
The Birds, chilly and hoarse,
Shall hide
Among the shivering leaves,
And Man,
The Dray-Horse of the World,
Worn and sleepy,
Shall grumble
To the Winds,
“It’s Night!”

V A N I T A S

Night

The Sun is dead —
The Moon,
The gloomy Sexton
Has spread across the giant corpse
A black drapery
Of clouds,
And lit
About the rayless head
White-flaming torches,
And urged
The garrulous Oceans
To wail disconsolately
And beat their hearts
Against the rocks —
Now,
Like some pale anchorite,
Who dead in faith
Still counts the rosaries,
He gazes at Infinity
And counts the ribs
Of sleeping leaves. . . .
The cynical Winds
Whistle and laugh. . . .

V A N I T A S

Gods and Men

I mused —
The gods are cruel gods,
And their murderous fingers
Seek incessantly
The throats of Things.
But man is greater than the gods,
And he can fashion
Much nobler worlds.
And from the clay of dreams
I build me Sphere on Sphere
Of beauty,
And endless labyrinths
Of Love. . . .
At my feet,
In painful disarray,
Lay the fragments
Of a rose,
Which absent-mindedly
I tore and pulled apart,
While building worlds. . . .
And then I understood —
The gods are melancholy poets

V A N I T A S

Dreaming — dreaming —
Wondrous Worlds
While absent-mindedly
They blind a sun,
And drop a star,
And crumble little earths. . . .

V A N I T A S

Atlas

Atlas passed me by —
Old and ragged and weary
And bent so low,
He seemed a giant dog,
Whose wounded forepaws
Dared not touch the ground.
I know not what he saw —
The cracked asphalt,
That unwound itself,
And spread away
Like broken tides
Of a silent sea,
Or the ceaseless procession
Of leathered feet,
Or his own shadow,
Black and flattened
Like a soul oppressed —

Atlas passed me by —
Carrying on his back
A sack of coal —
The heavy debris

V A N I T A S

Of a burnt-up star —
And at each step
He grumbled and swore
As of yore,
When on his mighty nape
The cosmos danced —
While the eternal gods
Now dwelling on the Earth
Still feast and laugh
As of yore. . . .

V A N I T A S

Snow

The Virgin Goddess of the Clouds,
Opens wide her casement,
And throws white roses
To her lover, the Earth —
White roses — white roses —
Gardens of white roses —
But the boorish Earth,
Shivers and grumbles:
“It’s snowing again!”





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